

Completed Transformation: integration into the European Union

For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe full integration with the European Union will constitute the crowning moment of their as yet unfinished economic and political transformation. The EU integration process will also become a crucial driving force for changes of the social structure, institutions and group interests whose new framework have been emerging since the fall of the Communist system.

This fact that integration into the EU is the final stage of transformation of the candidate countries and not merely a process of adapting to external conditions makes the present enlargement quite different to anything experienced before. When Sweden or Austria sought to join the Western European community their societies had a stable social structure and well-formed and effectively functioning democratic and financial institutions. In their case integration meant no more than adaptation of well developed and stable social systems to some new norms and circumstances and not as in the former Communist run countries the continuation of radical political and social changes. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are countries where a new social order and social structures are emerging. As integration is a driving force for change and is dictating its direction it will have a basic impact on the final character of those societies.

In this paper I would focus on the social changes which Poland faces as a result of the integration process and their impact on the evolution of attitudes to membership in the European Union.

THE FIRST STAGE OF TRANSFORMATION: FROM ANOMY TO ADAPTATION (1989-1997)

The changes in Poland followed a slightly different pattern from those in Hungary or the Czech Republic. After independence was regained, Polish reformers focused their attention

and their efforts on economic changes, such as rules governing the functioning of the economy, ownership transformation and privatization, financial infrastructure, the tax system, etc. No steps were taken to reform social policy and the basic functions and scope of activity of the welfare state. The government was withdrawing from its protective role unofficially, as if by the back door. As a result there followed an informal and spontaneous commercialisation and privatization of many social services. This laid the psychological ground-work for the future welfare reforms.

Social shock caused by the introduction of a new system was very strong. A brief spell of enthusiasm in 1989 and 1990, caused by the fall of Communism and the regained independence was followed by disillusionment due to the declining standard of living, upward and downward shifts in the positions of many groups in the society, and the necessity of adapting to new rules and values. In many people the abundance of goods on the market evoked increased aspirations, and when those were not satisfied, the awareness of their own limited purchasing power resulted in frustration.

The atmosphere of fear about everyone's own future and that of their children was intensified by increasing unemployment. At the same time, as a result of the first encounter with a market economy, the myth of the market as a system which would grant Poles both prosperity and full employment and justice collapsed. Its image, formed under communism, gradually became more realistic.

As a result of those experiences many people felt lost, apprehensive and hopeless. Depression and pessimism were most marked in the years 1991-1993. In May 1992 only 11 per cent of the society believed that Poland was going in the right direction, while 74 per cent held the opposite view and 48 per cent of the respondents described the situation of their own household as bad (11 per cent as good) (CBOS, May 1992). The beginning of economic growth brought about only a slight improvement of the general mood. In the parliamentary elections of 1993 voters rejected elites of Solidarity origin and supported post-Communist parties.

From 1994, growth tendencies became more marked. Many sociologists pointed out that with time Poles were getting used to market rules and even learning to accept them, at

least at the level of everyday behaviour. Many people's standard of living improved, and in 1995 unemployment was finally curbed. Social differences were indeed becoming more marked, but at the same time many households were able to satisfy their material aspirations (CBOS, February 1996.) After 1990, 30 per cent of the households purchased colour TV sets, which they had not owned before; 26 per cent - VCRs, 15 per cent - cable TV, etc. (op. cit.) Since 1992 the number of households having hi-fi audio equipment has more than doubled and now amounts to 27 per cent. A half of all families own a car.

This has resulted in a marked improvement in social mood, which started in 1994. In June 1997 already 52 per cent of respondents believed that the country was going in the right direction (41 percentage points more than four years earlier), and 25 per cent saw their own economic situation as good (CBOS, June 1997).

An increased acceptance of the new system and behaviour suited to the new market rules were also observed: ever more Poles were expressing satisfaction with the achieved changes and fewer longed for a return of the old system. Interestingly, acceptance for the new system increased rather than weakened after post-Communist parties had come into power. After a period of depression and anomy caused by dramatic changes, Poles opted for a slower pace of reform, but not for a return to the old system (L. Kolarska-Bobińska, 1994). Post-Communists promised to restrict privatization, which had been a source of fear for many people, to provide help for failing enterprises and to maintain the welfare state. Those promises, along with the ever more clearly observable and felt effects of economic growth, also contributed to appeasing the fears caused by rapidly occurring fundamental changes.

What is more, the most recent surveys indicate a gradual increase in social acceptance of solutions rewarding individual effort and personal responsibility for one's destiny, as well as diminishing support for redistributive policy on part of the state and options whose costs must be borne by all citizens. The general attitude to a welfare state is also changing. In the case of retirement program reform it can be described as moving away from ideas based on the principle of social solidarity towards endorsement of personal responsibility for securing one's old age. The system under which an employee pays premiums into a special individual account meets with greatest support; this has risen from 62 to 73 per cent over the last 2 years. The

number of people convinced that pensions should come only from a person's own accumulated contributions has also risen - from 31 to 39 per cent. (CBOS, September 1998).

Moreover, acceptance for privatisation and the presence of foreign capital has risen over the last 5 years, while support for state intervention in the economy has fallen. A majority (54 per cent) of Poles still approve of government support for failing industries in order to maintain jobs, but opposition to this solution has grown from 19 to 26 per cent in the last 4 years.

To sum up, the changes in Poland were characterised by significant fluctuations of social mood: from a short period of enthusiasm (1989-1990), through disillusionment, depression and anomy (1991-1993), to progressing adaptation to the new democratic and market rules since 1994. This has influenced the degree of legitimization of the new system, as shown by the following data.

Table 1 Acceptance of new system (percentages)

Have the changes occurring in Poland since 1989 brought more advantages or disadvantages for people?	Respondents' answers by date of survey		
	Oct 1994	July 1997	May 1998
More advantages than disadvantages	15	25	32
As many advantages as disadvantages	32	40	31
More disadvantages than advantages	42	22	27
Don't know	11	13	10

CBOS (July, 1998)

This shows that acceptance of the democratic system has increased in the recent period although one quarter of Polish society recently thought they were better off under the old system.

SECOND STAGE OF TRANSFORMATION: REFORM OF THE WELFARE STATE AND INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Poland is now entering the second stage of transformation. In 1999, an administrative reform will be launched which will mean not only a fundamental change of government structure, but also a reorganization, among others, of the education system, the health service and the police force. Various institutions of the welfare state will be reformed simultaneously: the national insurance system, education and health service. At the same time the process of adaptation to the requirements of the European Union will proceed.

Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz adopted from the start a sequential model of transformation: he systematically reformed the economy, while leaving major change of the welfare system for later. In the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus tried to reform both those spheres simultaneously, but he did it inconsistently.

In Poland it was the prevailing opinion that failing to reform the social security and health care systems at the beginning was a mistake, severely affecting the budget, and the propitious moment of social consent, necessary for the implementation of such difficult changes, had been overlooked. From today's perspective, however, it is possible to say that the delay in social reforms in Poland had been purposeful, as they can be more easily implemented in a period of high economic growth, such as we are experiencing now, than of recession and a deteriorating standard of living, which occurred at the beginning of the transformation period.

Despite the current economic growth, however, the reforms facing the country will be difficult for the society. They will affect the professional situation and life of people employed in the administration, health service, education and police - that is to say, large groups of the Polish educated class. They will not bring about significant unemployment or a drop in the

standard of living, but a new, unknown situation which will need adapting to, and therefore uncertainty about the future.

None of the planned reforms have been prepared well, and the administration has paid very little attention to their implementation. The government hastened to announce and launch the reforms in order to avoid accusations of having gone back on the promises of their platform. Moreover, politicians seem to have felt that social support for them, which was high immediately after the elections, would dwindle with time. Therefore they probably thought it advantageous to launch as many reforms as possible, even poorly prepared, rather than defer their introduction by working on implementation strategy. Thanks to that haste they appear to have hoped that the costs of the reorganization might be forgotten and positive results be felt by the next election in 2002, which would result in another victory of the present coalition.

The reform of the welfare system will take place simultaneously with changes stimulated by the integration process in the mining and steel industries and in agriculture.

At present it is estimated that structural transformation of the mining and steel industries will involve changes in the professional status of about 170,000 people (40,000 in the steel industry, the rest in mining and transport.) With regard to the changes in rural areas, the Minister of Agriculture, Jacek Janiszewski, has announced that the number of people employed in that sector will have to be reduced from 27 to 5 per cent of the workforce. At present there are 2 million farms in Poland, a half of which only produce food for their own needs. A quarter of those are farms of two hectares or less. On the whole, the structure of the Polish society will change in the coming 10 years and the interests of basic social groups will be affected by the process.

Polish sociologists believe that the nineties are a period of disintegration of the old social structure generated by, among other things, the economic and political mechanisms of socialism (H. Domański, A. Rychard 1997). Simultaneously with the decomposition of the old structure, a new post-communist order is emerging. The introduction of a market economy significantly altered the situation of blue-collar workers and of a part of the educated class, enhanced social differences and the role of education as a stratifying factor. According to H. Domański and A. Rychard, the emerging of a new order is a chaotic process, and its results are

difficult to predict (op.cit.). Yet even now it is apparent that integration with the European Union will cause further changes in social structure; for example, it will radically alter the character and situation of farmers - the group which so far has submitted to transformation towards a market economy to a lesser degree than all others. Before, Polish farmers survived the Socialist era, successfully defending their property, the form of ownership and their farming methods. Consequently, they are the most traditional group, and the one that's most resistant to change and modernization. Now, as I have already mentioned, according to Ministry of Agriculture data, the adaptation of Polish agriculture will force about three quarters of farmers, that is, 22 per cent of the total Polish workforce, to change their occupation and therefore their whole lifestyle. The changes taking place in agriculture will affect all those who live in the countryside, that is 40% of Polish population.

The opening of Polish markets to competition will also cause important changes in the structure of small and medium-sized businesses, although it remains unclear whether it will be the large firms that will find it the most difficult to adapt, or the medium-sized ones, suffering from lack of capital, information and new technologies. Changes in the mining and steel sectors will affect the character of particular regions and cities rather than the general structure of the whole society. To conclude, it can be said that changes will either include whole social classes or cause division within existing groups. They will not be comparable to the transformation which occurred in countries recently admitted to the European Union. Neither can they be compared to changes undergone by the societies of Spain or Greece, because the conditions accompanying the entrance of those countries differed very much from those in Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic.

Equally important changes, as those which will affect social structure, may be expected on the political scene. During the parliamentary elections in mid-1997 political parties displayed very uniform ideas in the field of foreign affairs: they all favoured European integration. However, as J. Kucharczyk aptly observed:

The declared uniform support for integration conceals a set of attitudes, the two extremes of which are two different approaches to integration. The first one is based on the assumption that it is necessary to speed up internal reforms in order to grant Poland a

stronger position both in negotiations and after entering the EU. The other approach to integration assumes that everything depends on the firm and unyielding behaviour of the negotiators, who should try to secure the most advantageous status possible for Poland.

Due to political correctness the ideological differences concerning integration were disguised during the election campaign under technical language related e.g. to the desired pace of integration. Different visions of united Europe only appeared in the vaguest outline. It is, however, possible to determine some basic elements of the different emerging positions. They are now articulated through such terms as: Christian Europe, The Europe of Homelands, the Homeland Europe, The Europe of Citizens, liberal Europe, social democratic Europe. (J. Kucharczyk, 1998)

A year later, the situation has changed dramatically, partly because negotiations are already under way, partly because of ideological differences between the two parties represented in the present government. Although still no party questions Poland's entrance into the European Union, some of them, for example the peasants' party PSL, express their anxiety and declare it is advisable „not to hasten”, to “negotiate hard” (put forward strict terms), calculate costs, or already to organize a referendum to answer the question whether the society approves of this course in Polish foreign policy. People questioning Poland's access to the European Union have appeared on the political scene and opponents have gained new media, such as the Catholic newspaper „Nasz Dziennik” (M. Łubieński, 1998).

The main lines along which the Polish political scene was divided during the parliamentary elections of 1997 were the attitude to the Communist past and to the role of the Church. The parties that received most support can be said to be at opposite poles. They are the right-wing, anti-Communist Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (Solidarity Electoral Action, AWS), emphasizing not only its dissident roots, but also Catholic values; and the post-Communist, left-wing and atheist Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance, SLD). The Cabinet was formed by post-Solidarity parties: AWS with the liberal and pro-market Unia Wolności (Liberty Union, UW). It may be expected that the beginning of negotiations and the adaptation process will bring about significant changes on the political scene.

In the next parliamentary elections, which will coincide with the conclusion of negotiations, coalitions will be determined by the attitude to integration options rather than to the past. In 1997, although all parties declared their support for joining the European Union, it could be inferred from platforms and leaders' declarations that UW and post-Communist SLD were the most "pro-integration" ones. The right-wing AWS is internally heterogeneous: it encompasses both moderate and extremely right-wing groups. One of the issues on which they differ is the attitude to integration strategy, i.e. the pace of integration, transition periods, areas which should be protected etc. As negotiations proceed and the referendum draws near, politicians will have to crystallize their opinions and positions. The attitude to the future will become more important than the evaluation of the past, and it will determine political coalitions. This will be the case because the approach to integration is more than just choosing a certain option in foreign policy; in the case of Poland it is a choice of a civilizational option. It will therefore encompass both the attitude to market-oriented economic reform and to the welfare state and a choice of ideology, either patriotic and Catholic or liberal and pro-European. On the whole, European integration will, by directing public attention to future problems facing the country, reduce the role of tradition and history as the main factors organizing the political scene. It will also accelerate the formation of a civil society.

After independence was regained, it was expected that the Polish society would welcome the new liberty and use the new opportunities to organize and form associations. Those expectations proved vain: instead of grassroots organizational activity, anomy, confusion and apathy occurred. People concentrated more on trying to keep up their deteriorating standard of living and on anxiety about their children's future; they did not participate in public and civil life. The slow development of civil society was also due to a lack of such habits and patterns of behaviour in Communist times. As new social strata and groups had not yet been formed, group interests were hardly crystallized and poorly represented. The only exception were numerous self-help organizations whose members assisted one another, thus providing some form of substitute for the welfare state, which was becoming less and less efficient at performing its functions.

Despite the lapse of time, the reinforced democracy and the improved social mood, electoral turnout is very low in Poland; newspaper readership is decreasing and is among the lowest in Europe (along with Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal), and the crystallization of professional, local and group interests is not gathering momentum.

The dialogue with different groups of civil society in the period when Poland's accession into the European Union is being negotiated encounters many difficulties. There are many weak organizations, representing small interest groups, which can not establish a common platform and reach consensus. For example, there are several dozen organizations representing employers who are unable to cooperate with each other on basic issues. On top of that three quarters of firms do not belong to any employers organization.

The period of negotiations will favour reflection on interest groups and attempts at defining their role in the changing situation. Redefining the interests of many social groups will be accompanied by searching for allies; as a result, previously scattered, small organizations will merge and consolidate. Doubtless, already existing, but inactive structures, such as for example the Chambers of Agriculture, will be used to articulate crystallizing interests.

The process of adaptation will assist the organization of interests and strengthening of a civil society. However, the crystallisation of interests will probably happen primarily in opposition to new accession rules and changes imposed by the adaptation process. Naturally, it is easier to organize and rally social protest than support, opponents than adherents.

ACCEPTANCE FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The reforms will be implemented during the negotiations with the European Union and will proceed simultaneously with adaptation strategies and behaviour. The question arises how those coinciding changes will affect the society's attitudes to ward European integration. Support for the integration has been declining for a few months; at present, 58% of the society approve of Poland entering the European Union. (M.Gierszewska, J.Kucharczyk 1998).

Institutional changes, regardless of how deep they are, will result in increased social anxiety and pessimism, and may lead to a further decrease of acceptance for Poland's

integration into the EU. Already many people attribute the reforms to the adaptation process and to heartless Brussels bureaucrats.¹ Even help for steelworkers from PHARE funds can be interpreted in this manner: *“They give because they’re causing all those problems”*.

The society’s attitude to the process of integration in the next few years will also be influenced by international events and the economic situation in Poland and abroad, by the rate of economic growth in our country and the extent and scope of the crisis on foreign markets. Economists differ as to next year’s rate of growth: some predict 3%, others 4-5%. At any rate, in 1999 growth will be smaller than a year earlier, and budget expenses will be larger due to the implementation of reforms. The rate of increase in salaries, which slowed down in 1998, may become even slower. Unpredictable effects of developments in the world economy may cause increased anxiety about the future for families, and consequently growing pessimism and decreasing support for European integration.

Some people incline to the view that we are doing better and better on our own, and therefore Poland do not necessarily needs to join the European Union. The enthusiasm of those people, who believed integration was essential for economic development, is therefore beginning to wane. However, slower economic growth may also become an argument for joining the EU: following the events in Russia may convince Poles that Poland has chosen the right direction of change, and persuade them to support a pro-European policy.

It’s difficult to assess today how Poland’s membership of NATO may affect attitudes towards integration. Membership of the European Union is perceived by many people as a way of ensuring external security for our country. After we are admitted to NATO, the security argument, which was important to many Poles, will lose weight.

Apart from the economic and international situation, the following factors also influence attitudes toward European integration:

a) perception of Poland’s position and its role in Europe (including self-evaluation and autostererotypes);

¹ During focus group interviews, one of the teachers expressed the view that Brussels should be responsible for carrying out the education reform (report “Comments and Suggestions Concerning the Proposed Educational System”, 1998)

- b) the social visions and myth of Europe;
- c) attitudes to other countries and nations;
- d) perception of the institutions and policies of the European Union.

The impact of each of those components on the overall picture is difficult to assess. Until now, the first three have prevailed. The negotiations will cause a change in perception: the talks will bring the institutions and policies of the European Union sharply into focus, while the myth of Europe will recede from view. The negotiations will be a source of many challenges, dilemmas and questions. Till now the high level of support for integration was based on the fragile foundation provided by a mixture of hope and ignorance, myths and expectations. In the coming period idealistic visions of Europe will be replaced with the play of interests, and hopes with cool calculation.

Poles have always felt an important part of Europe, its culture and identity; even though under Communism they were separated from what they felt a part of, separated not so much with a wall as with a fence, and one with a lot of holes in it.

Europe appeared to be a continent of milk and honey, where prosperity was combined with justice and efficiency and modernity with equality. During the Communist era not only a myth of market economy developed, but also a myth of Europe. Poles felt part of the whole, although most were convinced of our country's low standing - we were "poor, distant relatives" of the rich European family. Such low self-opinion survived after independence was regained and was reinforced by the recession of the late 90's, the sense of being behind the times and general pessimism.

In a survey based on a representative sample of Poles, respondents were asked: *In the year 2000, which countries will live on the best, and which on the worst floor of the common European home?* In 1992, 60% of the respondents believed Poland would be on the worst floor, and 36% - on a medium one (CBOS, July 1998). With the improved economic situation in Poland, perceptibly increased prosperity and better individual adaptation to the new system, Poles' opinions about themselves and their country expressly improved. In 1996 only 41% of respondents placed their country in the worst part of the European home, and 55% chose a medium level (CBOS, op.cit.). Those important changes - improved perception of Poland's

position in Europe - happened in a short time, in four years. Recently, however, this improvement has stopped: in 1998, 53% of the respondents again placed Poland on the lowest level, and 44% - on a medium one (CBOS, July 1998). At the same time, although both Hungary and the Czech Republic have maintained their position in the middle category, that position aroused more doubts than in previous years. It is difficult to determine unequivocally the reason behind that significant change in the evaluation of Poland's position in Europe. The writer of the report attributes it to increased awareness of the scale of barriers and problems which must be overcome if a country wants to become a member of the European Union. I also believe that it may be partly due to signals received from abroad - statements by many EU officials suggesting that Poland is changing its regulations too slowly, is poorly prepared, and therefore the process of admitting new member should be delayed.

The autostereotype has also undergone change, although not as rapid as in the case of the perception of Poland's position in Europe. In characterizing their nation, Poles most often point to community values: attachment to the family, religion and patriotism. In describing a European citizen, they cite the values which are fundamental to capitalist ideology and protestant ethics: focus on work and career, frugality, wealth, individualism and a drive to education. With time, or rather under the influence of experiences related to a market economy, the Polish national autostereotype became closer to the image of a European. Poles have become, in their own opinion, more interested in professional success, and less in the family and religion (CBOS, op.cit.) To sum up, although Poland has always been perceived by its inhabitants as a part of Europe, the introduction of capitalism and democracy stimulated the perceived strength of links with the continent.

In spite of those changes the Communist era and the division into two political blocks resulted in the concept of Europe being extremely vague, indistinct, even as regards its geographical boundaries. Poles can not tell which countries belong to Europe and which do not: in 1994, 34% of the respondents replied "I don't know" to the question "Where is the eastern border of Europe?"; 26% named the river Bug (the eastern border of Poland) and 15% the rivers Odra and Nysa (Poland's western border) (CBOS, August 1998). Four years later, when negotiations with the European Union had already begun, 28% of Poles still did not

know where the eastern boundary of Europe was and 17% believed it to be identical with Poland's eastern border (op. cit.) It can be concluded that despite closer relations with the West, the social perception of "Europe's boundaries" has hardly changed.

Attitudes to other European nations and perceptions of other countries are influenced by many factors, among them: the remembrance of historical relations, stereotypes, similarities between the two nations, the dominating ideology in a country (democratic vs. authoritarian), the economic situation both of the perceived nation and the perceiving one. As I have already mentioned, economic growth, a drop in unemployment and adaptation to the new reality have caused social anxiety, frustration and anomy to decrease. Growing optimism resulted in greater openness towards foreigners, a more friendly attitude to many countries and nationalities and greater acceptance for the presence of foreign capital in Polish economy. Surveys conducted regularly since 1993 show that hostility towards unpopular nations has indeed dropped, particularly towards those which rank in the middle of the scale of friendly/unfriendly feelings. For example, in 1993, 53% of those interviewed expressed antipathy towards Germans; in 1994 the figure was 30%. Antipathy towards Lithuanians fell during that time from 43 to 30%, towards Jews from 51 to 41%. 1995 was the first year when the number of people expressing friendly feelings towards Germans exceeded the number of those hostile towards that nation. The Italians, the French, the English and the Swedes - strong members of the European Union - are among the nations who rank highest in Poles' regard.

At the same time it seems that the very foundations on which Poles' attitudes to other nations rested are changing. Poles incline more to cold calculation - historical experiences and sentimental reasons are playing a smaller role. Thanks to the rules of the market economy, relations which before were based only on emotions and phobias are now taking into account financial gains and losses. For a few years now Germany and Russia, nations which do not enjoy the friendship of all Poles, have been mentioned in surveys, alongside with the USA, as the most desirable economic and political partners for Poland (CBOS, July 1998).

FROM THE MYTH OF EUROPE TO THE REALITY OF NEGOTIATIONS

The process of integration still appears to most Poles as a distant matter, dealt with by politicians and happening as if above ordinary people's heads. It is an abstraction, which is understandable, as the negotiations are to last several years, and an even longer time will elapse before a possible referendum. In the coming years public opinion will crystallize and split into various options. At present, most Poles (65%) would like Poland to join the Union not later than in 5 years, i.e. by the year 2003 (L. Kolarska-Bobińska, J.Kucharczyk, 1998). But already today it can be observed that there is a growing group of decided supporters, who want Poland to join the European Union as soon as possible (by the year 2000 - 40%), and a much less numerous group of opponents (in ten years' time or never - 20%).

The beginning of negotiations created a new situation in which general ideas about the European Union started changing under the influence of new information, taking on a more concrete and meaningful shape. Controversial issues have also come up, such as the PHARE funds which were refused to Poland; public debate begun. Under the influence of various experiences and contacts with the European Union, the myth of Europe started taking on a real shape.

The influx of information concerning the European Union and the negotiations may dispel certain fears, but will also foster greater scepticism in some groups. Poles are already more critical: there is a growing sense of unequal and disproportionate relations between Poland and the Union. Shortly before negotiations started 38% of respondents were convinced that the European Union benefited more from the relations than Poland. In a year, the proportion of people supporting that view grew from 31% to 38% (op.cit.). This view may become stronger, as may the conviction that weak Poland "will not win" in negotiations with a strong and well-prepared partner. Before the talks began in February, most Poles split into two groups of very similar size (about 40% each): one which believed that Poland was not well prepared for the negotiations and that the government was submissive towards the EU, and another, which showed more trust in the government and our preparation (op.cit.).

It can therefore be said that the general positive attitude towards the European Union and the hopes connected with integration are accompanied by fears concerning the failure of weak enterprises and farms. As many as 38% of the respondents express their anxiety that

many Polish firms may fail; the remaining respondents believe the firms can stand up to competition if they are granted a sufficiently long period of protection (39%) (M.Gierszewska, J.Kucharczyk, 1998) . Those concerns are enhanced by the belief that we are not sitting down to negotiations well prepared, and that government is behaving submissively.

On the whole, the factors described above have resulted in reduced acceptance for integration - it started falling at the beginning of 1998: in February 64% of those asked accepted Poland's introduction into the Union; in June the figure was 58%. (op.cit). The change, however, was due to an increased number of respondents who declared themselves lost and confused, not to more opponents. The question arises how the fundamental changes occurring in the Polish society will affect attitudes to integration; which approach will win: the fear of whole social strata about their future, or the hopes for new chances and opportunities.

It must be remembered that in the near future the children of another baby boom, the second largest one since World War Two, will enter the job market. Young people will be looking for their place in life, and integration into the European Union may be for them a chance which their parents could only dream about. At present it is the young people and the unemployed, as well as government employees and executives, who base the greatest hopes on European integration. That is why it is essential that the western job markets should open to Polish citizens.

In the face of growing scepticism, which may become even deeper in the future, it seems crucial to find ideas which would be a base and a driving force of our integration into the European Union. The whole process should not be reduced to an exercise in accounting, where profits are on one side and losses on the other. In that way it would be difficult to maintain social support, incite the imagination and motivate the effort and activity necessary to overcome the problems connected with Poland's preparation. Those ideas should refer to a vision of a new European order, a new Europe for the new generation, which is entering the job market.

When looking for a leading idea for the process of integration it is necessary to make sure the message will get response in the society. Otherwise a dramatic drop in support will ensue, like the one observed in 1991 and 1992 with regard to a market economy. Anxiety

about growing social differences should not be strengthened by seeing integration as an elitist process; it should not add to the already existing division into “winners” and “losers”.

Poland’s entrance into the European Union seen as a chance for many, particularly for the young generation, may appeal to collective imagination, especially if it is presented as a means to the modernization of the country, and not an aim in itself.

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